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## Policy to improve equity in legal profession achieves key target

A policy designed to track and increase opportunities for female lawyers has reached a significant milestone.

“The Law Council of Australia launched the Equitable Briefing Policy in 2016 and a key target was to have women barristers briefed in at least 30 per cent of all matters by 1 July 2020. Data released today shows this objective has been achieved, with 31 per cent of briefs going to women barristers as at the end of the 2019-2020 financial year,” Law Council of Australia President, Mr Tass Liveris revealed.

“It is particularly pleasing to be able to announce this outcome in the lead up to tomorrow’s International Women’s Day.”

Overall, the 2019-2020 reporting period found that of the 32,995 total briefs, 31 per cent (10,291) of these briefs went to female barristers and 69 per cent (22,704) went to male barristers. This has exceeded the final target of the Policy by one percentage point and represents an increase of four percentage points from the previous reporting year.

“Female junior barristers were briefed at an even higher rate, receiving 37 per cent of briefs,” Mr Liveris said. “This is an important measure as receiving briefs helps junior barristers gain more experience and further develop their legal career.”

“We had a similar goal for reducing the gap between fees paid to male and female barristers. While the gap has reduced, unfortunately our aspiration regarding the proportion of fees paid to women barristers was not realised.”

Twenty three per cent of fees Briefing Entities reported paying in 2019-20 went to women.

“However, it is gratifying that there has been steady improvement in each of the major categories since the Policy came into effect. In 2016-2017, only 20 per cent of briefs went to female barristers and the proportion of fees being paid to women barristers stood at just 15 per cent,” Mr Liveris said.

“Beyond the quantitative data, the Policy has been effective in drawing attention to issues of gender equity and causing entities to consciously reflect on their briefing practices. The Policy continues to provide a strong and motivating base for improving choices, optimising opportunities for practice development and promoting the full use of the independent bar in Australia.

“We cannot be complacent though. We are now reviewing the Policy to consider improvements we might make to further support the Law Council’s longstanding commitment to a diverse and inclusive legal profession.”

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